

TRAVIS DARLING is losing his grip on the bull he's riding during the Ute Mountain High School Rodeo on Saturday. High school students from around the state competed in the rodeo that lasted all day Saturday, Sunday and Monday at the Montezuma County Fairgrounds.

9-2-03 CORTEZ JOURNAL

Rico residents, officials discuss cleanup of sites

BY NATE THOMPSON
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

RICO — About 35 Rico residents participated in a rare opportunity last week. Townsfolk met with representatives of state and federal environmental agencies to talk about contaminated mining sites in this quiet valley nestled in the mountains near the headwaters of the Dolores River.

The meeting was structured as a question-and-answer session and focused, primarily, on the St. Louis Tunnel. The site, originally mined by NL Industries (formerly the National Lead Co.) and ARCO, Atlantic Richfield Co., is believed by most to be the chief source of heavy-metal pollution in the area.

"There will be no decisions made at this meeting," Ted Linnert, Environmental Protection Agency community involvement coordinator, said. "This is just an input meeting."

Hoping to develop the site, Rico Development Co. purchased it from ARCO in 1988. Under a permit issued by the state of Colorado, the company was responsible for treating the continually discharging contaminated water from the tunnel. However, treatment failed to meet standards set by the Clean Water Act and other public health regulations.

The Wednesday, Aug. 27 meeting was intended to clarify the cleanup options and determine agencies responsible for enforcing facets of the cleanup

project.

Rico residents wanted to make sure the town would not be responsible for the cost of remediation. Another concern was the timeliness of the work. EPA officials said that before cleanup can happen, the agency must make sure the money is in place and that the community is in support of the process.

An alternative for funding would be to add the site to the National Priority List (NPL) of Superfund sites, said David Williams, EPA Superfund coordinator.

"But NPL is controversial," Williams said, and requires support from the governor and the community.

Sheldon Muller, EPA enforcement attorney, said that although the agency can compel responsible parties to pay for site cleanup, he prefers that the work be done voluntarily. "When the EPA does the work, it always costs more," he said.

Muller said ARCO is willing to help bring the tunnel and other areas into compliance.

"I think our answer ... is that we can do the work cost effectively," Chuck Stillwell, ARCO's environmental manager, said during the meeting. "A cooperative effort will take less time and does not compromise the integrity (of the cleanup)."

Rico Town Attorney Eric Heil said that discussions with ARCO had been ongoing for about two years. The talks had

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'Sporadic' rain offers cooler temperatures

BY STEVE GRAZIER
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

As August ends, so should the hot temperatures that have plagued the Four Corners region during much of this summer.

Local weather observer Jim Andrus said Monday to expect cooler temperatures throughout the area as fall approaches.

"With the days gradually continuing to get shorter, we now have approximately two minutes less of sunlight each day," he said. "This is helping to cool things down significantly."

"So it's safe to expect cooling temperatures for September, mostly in the 80s, as we had 18 days of 90 degree or above in August."

For August, Andrus reported precipitation of 1.13 inches, 0.35 inches less than the monthly average of 1.48 inches. Still, it could have been worse.

"We've received 76 percent of our normal August totals, so things have definitely improved some from earlier summer months," he explained. "The recent monsoon system did bring in some moisture, but for around here, it was mostly disorganized and sporadic."

Precipitation totals for the year thus far have the region at 5.67 inches, about 70 percent of the average of 8.08 inches.

"We've had some relief, but it continues to be a dry year," Andrus said.

Some relief was recorded Saturday, the last day in August with measurable pre-



BAILY MCNAMARA, 7, from Montezuma, and her brother, Justin, 2, from Holly, sit on Saturday morning at the Ute Mountain Rodeo. McNamara's dog Itsy didn't seem to

precipitation, Andrus said.

"The rain from Saturday only netted us about 0.03 inches around Cortez," he said. "However, I think more

had oversight responsibility for such sites as Grand Teton, Grand Canyon and Yellowstone national parks, as well as 86 other historic and scenic places in Utah, Colorado, Arizona, Montana, New Mexico, Texas, Wyoming and Oklahoma.

"With Karen's retirement the National Park Service loses a great champion and visionary,"

Intermountain Region, Wade has sought to develop connections between parks and the local communities where they are located and with interested organizations, other governments, and the general public. Such connections, Wade has told park managers, are essential to preserving America's important places, places that are

Rainier, Yosemite, Washington, D.C. monuments and memorials; Albright Training Center in Grand Canyon and Great Smokies.

Wade's first permanent appointment with the National Park Service was in 1978 as a trail coordinator for the Appalachian Trail Project, where she was part of the NPS team that led the early efforts to protect the trail.

park environments and environmental management systems in the Intermountain Region.

Wade led the Service response during several major crises including the murder of Ranger Joe Kolodski in Great Smoky Mountains National Park in the '90s and Ranger Chris Eggle in Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument last year.

She also took the responsibility

RICO

★ Company, community consider ways to expedite solution

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led to a proposal to form a nonprofit company to organize the cleanup efforts and funnel funding from ARCO, the government and any additional sources into the project.

"We're looking forward to something tangible (about forming a nonprofit company) on the table in the next few months," Heil said. However, while an agreement to create a nonprofit company is an important first step, "the biggest hurdle is funding," he said.

Muller said there would also need to be an enforcement agreement to allow EPA to set compliance standards.

After the meeting, Stillwell said that he didn't think ARCO's compliance with the EPA would be a problem if the company did the work itself.

"The EPA would only be concerned with getting the site cleaned up," Stillwell said, but ARCO and the property holders want to redevelop the site, now just leave it as a reclaimed mine.

EPA's lead mining technical



AFTER A TOWN meeting with the EPA in Rico last week, Chuck Stillwell, far left, environmental manager for the Atlantic Richfield Co. and Sheldon Muller, far right, EPA enforcement attorney, discuss cleanup options for the St. Louis Tunnel and other mining sites in the Rico area that are a growing concern for area residents.

coordinator, Carol Russell, concluded the meeting with comments that reflected the urgency behind some community members' worries about any cleanup delay. She said,

"I'd be remiss in leaving without saying I'm concerned ... especially with the children," she said, referring to heavy-metal contamination. "Make sure you wash their hands

when they come in from playing."

Nate Thompson can be reached at nate1@cortezjournal.com.

BRIEFS

GOP women, committee to meet

The Montezuma County Republican Central Committee will hold its regular monthly meeting at noon Thursday at the Shiloh Restaurant in Cortez. All Republicans are welcome to attend.

The Republican Women of Montezuma County will meet at noon Sept. 8 at the Anasazi Restaurant in Cortez. All Republican women are welcome to attend.

55+ Dance Club to meet Thursday

The 55+ Dance Club will hold its regular business meeting at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 4, in

the Montezuma County Annex Senior Center, 107 N. Chestnut, in Cortez.

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